

Age-Level Overview

	Open the Bible	Activate Faith
Lower Elementary		
WORKSHOP FOCUS: God surprised the world with Jesus!	SPARK RESOURCES: Spark Story Bibles	SPARK RESOURCES:
SHEEP, SHEEP, SURPRISE: Kids play a surprising version of Duck, Duck, Goose.	SUPPLIES: Noisemakers	SUPPLIES: Christmas Surprise Timeline Relay Cards (page 41), CD player, Christmas music CD, masking tape, noisemakers, 2 sets of place cards (1-5)
CHRISTMAS SURPRISE TIMELINE RELAY: Kids race to complete a Christmas story timeline.		
Upper Elementary		
WORKSHOP FOCUS: Jesus is our true Christmas gift.	SPARK RESOURCES: Spark Bibles, Spark Bible Stickers	SPARK RESOURCES: Spark Bibles
PRESENT TREASURE HUNT: Kids open presents to solve a word puzzle.	SUPPLIES: Wrapped Christmas present	SUPPLIES: Present Treasure Hunt Clues (page 43), wrapped present boxes (wrap lids separately so they can be lifted off), box labels: Star; King Herod; Mary and Joseph; Wise Men; Angel; Bethlehem; Shepherds; Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh; Nerf or beach ball, CD player, <i>Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel</i> on CD
EMMANUEL HOT POTATO: Kids attempt to quickly pass on the good news of Emmanuel.		
All Kids		
WORKSHOP FOCUS: God uses everyday people in the Christmas story.	SPARK RESOURCES: Spark Story Bibles, Spark Bibles, Spark Bible Stickers	SPARK RESOURCES: Spark Story Bible
CHRISTMAS CHARACTERS: Kids run to find the ordinary people in the Christmas story.	SUPPLIES: None	SUPPLIES: Christmas Characters Clues (page 45), Christmas Pictionary Clues (page 47), signs (Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, Shepherds), hat, whiteboard, markers, stopwatch, candy canes
CHRISTMAS Pictionary: Kids play Pictionary to learn about the Christmas story.		



Looking for additional Spark content to further engage kids? Visit www.wearesparkhouse.org to learn more about these options for purchase.

- The Director CD-Rom contains Activity Pages, Coloring Pages, Family Pages, Large Group Openings, and two additional in-class activities for each lesson.
- A Sparkhouse Digital annual subscription gives you access to all content contained in the Director CD-Rom and the Spark Leader Guides, plus administrative tools and other extras.

Workshop Focus: God surprised the world with Jesus!

Keep these tips in mind as you welcome kids to the workshop and explore the story together.

- Each week, remember to welcome kids to the rotation. Keep in mind that for some kids it may be the first time they are visiting your workshop!
- If kids have heard the story several times during previous weeks, read it again! Kids learn through repetition, and every workshop will explore the Bible story in a slightly different way.
- Remember that the Shepherds are there to support you as they accompany kids each week.

Open the Bible (10 minutes)

Advent and Christmas Storytelling

Set Up: Tell the Shepherd ahead of time to have the children gather on the floor while you wait in your “hiding” place.

Activity Instructions

Before the Shepherds and the children arrive, hide somewhere in the room or out in the hallway with a noisemaker. (Tell the Shepherd ahead of time.) As the kids settle down, burst into the room, blow the noisemaker, and shout “**Surprise!**”

I hope I didn’t scare you. Sometimes surprises can be scary, but they can also be exciting. Do you know what a surprise is? Take their answers. **A surprise is when something unexpected happens. Today we are going to read the Christmas story and learn about Mary, her cousin, Elizabeth, Joseph, and the shepherds. I want you to listen for surprises in our story. Whenever I say the words “scared,” “surprise” or “suddenly” blow your noisemakers.**

Spark Resources

Spark Story Bible

Supplies

Noisemakers, 1 per leader and
1 per kid

Read Angels Visit on pages 196-201, Mary Visits Elizabeth on pages 202-207, and Jesus Is Born on pages 212-217 in the Spark Story Bible. Pause at the key words.

Who got a surprise in our story? Pause for answers. **God surprised everyone in our story! Today we're going to learn that God uses surprises to get people's attention. God uses surprises to tell us that something important is happening in the world.**

Activate Faith (25 minutes)

Sheep, Sheep, Surprise

Set Up: Have the children gather in a circle on the floor.

Activity Instructions

In our story today there were a lot of surprises. I think maybe the shepherds in the story got the biggest surprise. They were out taking care of their sheep and suddenly a whole bunch of singing angels appeared. What would you think if you saw that? Allow the kids to imagine and describe what it might have been like to be a shepherd in the story.

The shepherds weren't expecting to do anything that night besides take care of their sheep. But God had other plans. Today we're going to play a game that is sort of like Duck, Duck, Goose. The game will help us imagine what it was like to be a shepherd that night.

Explain that Sheep, Sheep Surprise is a mix of musical chairs and Duck, Duck, Goose. One person will be It. It will walk around the circle tapping kids on the head and saying "Sheep" as they go. While It is tapping kids on the head, the music will be playing. When the music stops, It must say "Surprise" and then run and be chased, as in the normal game of Duck, Duck, Goose. In this game, neither the person who is It, nor the kids in the circle, knows when the Surprise is coming.

Play several rounds with the children. Vary the length of the music, but try to give each kid a chance to be It.

Normally when we play Duck, Duck, Goose, the person who is It decides when to say "Goose." How did the game change when we added a surprise? Take their responses. **Did it take a bit longer to react in this game than in the normal version of the game? The shepherds must have felt a bit confused, like we did in the game. They didn't know what was coming. They might have been slow to understand what they saw. But they listened to the angels and they went to see Jesus for themselves.**

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

CD player

Christmas music CD

Christmas Surprise Timeline Relay

Set Up: Place two 6-foot (2-meter) strips of masking tape on the wall at kids' height for the timelines. Time lines are for two teams; separate the timelines by a few feet on the wall. Attach the numbered place cards in order on the timelines, with a foot between each place card. Mark two starting lines on the floor across the room from the timelines.

Activity Instructions

Because we hear the Christmas story every year, we don't always think about all of the surprises that the people in our story faced. We know that Jesus was born in the stable, but Mary didn't know that! It was a surprise to her. Surprises can be scary, but also exciting.

For this next game we are going to look at some of the surprises of the Christmas story and put them in the order that they happened. Introduce the Surprise Timeline Cards and briefly explain what each one represents. This step ensures that non-readers know which surprise from the story is on each card.

Divide the group into two teams of no more than five kids each. If there are not enough kids on a team, ask the Shepherd to participate.

Explain that one at a time the kids on each team will look at their Christmas Surprise Timeline Card and run down to place it in the correct spot on the floor in front of the time line. After all the cards have been placed, the whole team runs to the timeline. They work together to see if their timeline story order is correct. When the timeline is complete, the team blows their noisemakers and yells SURPRISE! When one team yells surprise, the other team must freeze while the leader checks to see if the timeline is correct. If so, that team wins!

Today we learned about some of the surprises of Christmas. The Christmas story is full of surprises, because Christmas is a very good surprise. God promised the people for hundreds of years that Jesus would come to be with them. And at Christmas, Jesus finally arrived!

Send (5 minutes)

Wrap Up

Remind the Shepherds to distribute the Family Page for this story if the kids haven't already received them, and come together for Wrap Up.

Today we learned about some of the surprises in the Christmas story. Jesus was a surprise for Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds! Jesus was a surprise gift for us, too. Sometimes we may think that the only surprises at Christmas are in our presents under the tree, but Jesus is the best surprise of all!

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

Noisemakers
Masking tape, 2, 6-foot (2 meters) strips
2 sets of place cards (1-5)
Christmas Surprise Timeline Relay Cards (page 41), 1 set per team

Spark Resources

Family Pages



Supplies

None

Prayer Time

**Dear God,
Thank you for sending Jesus, our best Christmas surprise,
Help all our surprises this Christmas to be good ones.
In your name we pray, Amen.**

Workshop Focus: Jesus is our true Christmas gift.

Keep these tips in mind as you welcome kids to the workshop and explore the story together.

- Each week, remember to welcome kids to the rotation. Keep in mind that for some kids it may be the first time they are visiting your workshop!
- If kids have heard the story several times during previous weeks, read it again! Kids learn through repetition, and every workshop will explore the Bible story in a slightly different way.
- Remember that the Shepherds are there to support you as they accompany kids each week.

Open the Bible (10 minutes)

Advent and Christmas Storytelling

Set Up:

Sit with the kids in a circle on the floor with the Christmas present in front of you.

Activity Instructions

Welcome to Bible Skills and Games! Today we are going to talk about Christmas presents! Do you like presents? Tell me about one of the best Christmas presents you ever got. What are you asking for this year? Take the kids answers.

Those sound like some wonderful presents. Christmas time is about one extra special present. Let's read our story and see if we can figure out the extra special present of Christmas. Read Matthew 1:18-25 on page 1058 and Matthew 2:1-12 on pages 1058-1059 in the Spark Bible. Encourage the children to take turns reading aloud and to use their Spark Bible stickers.

What do you think is the extra special present of Christmas? Listen to kids' guesses. **The true present of Christmas is Jesus! Why is Jesus an extra special present?** Take kids' answers.

Spark Resources

Spark Bibles
Spark Bible Stickers

Supplies

Wrapped Christmas present

Jesus is the true present. We call Jesus “Emmanuel”. Do you remember what Emmanuel means? (God with us) When you’re with someone, you say you’re present with that person. Jesus is an extra special present because Jesus showed us that God was present on earth. Do you notice how those words sound alike? Jesus is a present (like a gift) because God is present (there with us) in Jesus.

Activate Faith (25 minutes)

Present Treasure Hunt

Set Up:

Place the wrapped boxes with the letters inside and the labels on the outside at one side of the room.

Activity Instructions

For our first game today we are going to answer some questions, open some presents, and solve a puzzle to discover the greatest present of Christmas.

Point out the pile of presents to the kids. Explain to them that each present has some words on the outside. The words on the presents are the answers to the questions you’re going to ask them. Explain that you will ask a question and if a kid thinks they know the answer, they can raise their hand. If the kid answers the question correctly, they can open the package and take out the clue letter. After all of the questions have been correctly answered the kids must collect all their letters and unscramble them to find the best Christmas present. Encourage the kids to use their Bibles if they need to look up the answers in the story we read today.

What is the greatest Christmas gift? (Emmanuel) Do you remember what Emmanuel stands for? (God with us) Why do you think it is so special that God came to be with us in Jesus? Take their responses. God chose to become human in Jesus Christ. This means that God truly wanted to be with us and save us. Jesus is God’s greatest present to us all—he loved us so much that he became one of us.

Spark Resources

Spark Bibles

Supplies

Present Treasure Hunt Clues
(page 43)

Wrapped present boxes
(wrap lids separately so
they can be lifted off), 8

Box labels:

Star
King Herod
Mary and Joseph
Wise Men
Angel
Bethlehem
Shepherds
Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh

Emmanuel Hot Potato

Set Up: Gather the kids in a circle.

Activity Instructions

We call Jesus a special name, “Emmanuel”. Emmanuel means God with us. Part of the joy of Christmas is telling other people that God is with us. Many people believe that Christmas is only about Santa and presents. We know that the true meaning of Christmas is Jesus.

In this next game our job is to share Emmanuel with each other as fast as we can. To do this we will play a game of Emmanuel Hot Potato.

Number kids off to form two teams. Seat kids in alternating spots in a circle (team 1, team 2, team 1, team 2, etc). Explain that the kids will pass the Emmanuel Hot Potato (ball) around the circle while the music plays. Their goal is to pass Emmanuel on to the next person quickly, because we want to share the true gift of Christmas with everyone. When the music stops the team who is not holding the ball gets a point. The first team to get 10 points wins.

Jesus is the true gift of Christmas, but many people only think about Santa and presents under the tree when they think of Christmas. What are some ways that you can share the news that Jesus is the true gift of Christmas? Take the kids responses. Those are some great ideas. I hope that you will take the time to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. Do you remember what Emmanuel means? (God with us) Jesus is Emmanuel. He is God with us here today. Where can you see Jesus in the world today?

Send (5 minutes)

Wrap Up

Remind the Shepherds to distribute the Family Page for this story if the kids haven't already received them, and come together for Wrap Up.

God sent Jesus to Mary, to the wise men, and to the whole world. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. We can share our gift of Emmanuel with the world and tell others about Jesus.

Prayer Time

**Dear God,
Thank you for being the true gift of Christmas.
Help us to share you, the true gift of Christmas.
Bless us, Emmanuel. Amen.**

Spark Resources

None

Supplies

Nerf or beach ball

CD player

Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel
on CD

Spark Resources

Family Pages



Supplies

None

Workshop Focus: God uses everyday people in the Christmas Story

Keep these tips in mind as you welcome kids to the workshop and explore the story together.

- Each week, remember to welcome kids to the rotation. Keep in mind that for some kids it may be the first time they are visiting your workshop!
- If kids have heard the story several times during previous weeks, read it again! Kids learn through repetition, and every workshop will explore the Bible story in a slightly different way.
- Remember that the Shepherds are there to support you as they accompany kids each week.

Open the Bible (10 minutes)

Advent and Christmas Storytelling

Set Up: None

Activity Instructions

Welcome to Bible Skills and Games! Today we are going to learn about the Christmas story. What do you know about the Christmas story already? Allow the kids to tell you as much about the story as they remember. **That's great! You sure remember a lot about the story. Let's go into our Bibles and read about the story some more.**

Open the Spark Story Bible and read Angels Visit on pages 196-201, Mary Visits Elizabeth on pages 202-207, and Jesus Is Born on pages 212-217. Encourage the older children to follow along in their Spark Bibles. Luke 1:26-56 appears on pages 1127-1129, and Luke 2:1-20 is on page 1130. Allow time for kids to use their Spark Stickers.

Something in particular makes me excited about the Christmas story today. My excitement has to do with something special about Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. Any guesses about what's special about those people? Take their

Spark Resources

Spark Story Bible
Spark Bibles
Spark Bible Stickers

Supplies

None

answers. **Those are great guesses. Now I'll tell what I think makes Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds special. NOTHING!**

Mary, Joseph and all the other people in our story were ordinary, everyday people. They are special because God chose everyday people, just like us, to help bring Jesus into the world. God loved the ordinary people in the Christmas story. God loves us, too!

Activate Faith (25 minutes)

Christmas Characters

Set Up: Place one sign in each corner of the room so they are visible. Make sure to have the list of game questions ready.

Activity Instructions

God chose everyday people to be in the Christmas story. God chose everyday people because that is who Jesus came to serve, everyday folks. Like all of us! We're ordinary, and we're special, because God loves us. In our first game today we are going to learn more about some everyday people in our story: Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, and the shepherds.

Explain to kids that you will be sharing a clue about one of the people in our story (Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth or the shepherds). Their job is to run to the correct corner that answers the clue. If kids run to the wrong corner, they are out. The game ends when we are out of questions or there is one person remaining.

Please note: Plan to jump around on the list, but keep track of which sentences you use. Some sentences have more than one answer. If the game ends quickly, you can play another round. If the game ends with all of the kids still in the game they are all winners!

I'm so glad that you know about Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, and the shepherds. The people in our story are a lot like you and me. They were going about their daily lives when God decided to share Jesus with them. We never know when God will choose to bless us and call us into service, like he did for Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth and the shepherds.

Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, and the shepherds all said yes to God. Mary said "Yes!" and carried God's Son. Joseph said "Yes!" and married Mary. Elizabeth said "Yes!" and shared her joy. The shepherds said "Yes!" and went to find baby Jesus in the manger.

I hope we will say "Yes!" when God calls us.

Spark Resources

Spark Story Bible

Supplies

Christmas Characters Clues
(page 45)

Signs, 4 (Mary, Elizabeth,
Joseph, Shepherds)

Christmas Pictionary

Set Up: Cut up the Christmas Pictionary clues into strips and place the strips in a hat. Prepare the whiteboard for drawing.

Activity Instructions

For our second game today we are going to play Christmas Pictionary. Count off the children into two teams. Include younger and older children on each team.

Explain to kids that you are playing Pictionary. Each clue will either be about the first Christmas or about Christmas in our time. Each team will take turns sending one person to pick a clue from the hat and draw the clue. Their team guesses what they are drawing. Each team will have one minute to draw and guess. If they have not guessed the right answer after a minute the other team may have one guess. Whenever a correct guess is made, that team gets a point. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

That was fun! You kids are wonderful artists. Why do you suppose we drew pictures from both the first Christmas story and Christmas today? Take the kids guesses. **The story in the Bible of the first Christmas shows us how ordinary, everyday people said yes to God. Nowadays we can also say yes to God, just like Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth and the shepherds did.**

Send (5 minutes)

Wrap Up

Remind the Shepherds to distribute the Family Page for this story if the kids haven't already received them, and come together for Wrap Up.

Today you each get two candy canes, one for you and one to share with someone else. When you share your candy cane I want you to also share something about the Christmas story. What are some things we can share about the Christmas story? Take their answers. **Why might it be hard to share the Christmas story with someone?** Take their answers. *Before serving any food, always check with caregivers for kids who have food allergies. Provide an alternative if necessary.*

Prayer Time

Dear God,

We know it can sometimes be hard to say yes to you. But Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth and the shepherds said yes. Give us the courage to share the Christmas story with our friends. In your name we pray, Amen

Spark Resources

None

Supplies:

Christmas Pictionary Clues
(page 47)
Hat
Whiteboard
Markers
Stopwatch

Spark Resources

Family Pages



Supplies

Candy canes, 2 per kid

Christmas Surprise Timeline Relay Cards

Surprise! Mary is surprised to learn from the angel she will have a son.



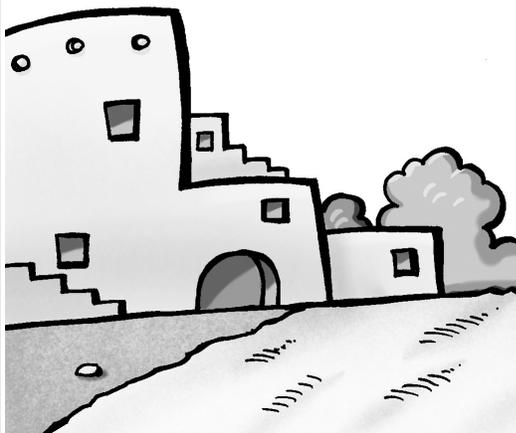
Surprise! It is time for baby Jesus to be born here in the stable.



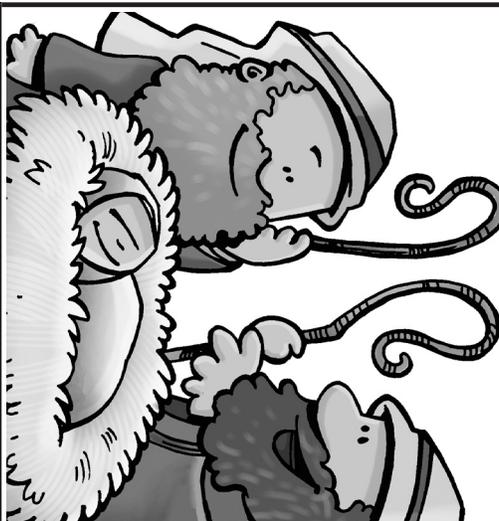
Surprise! The angels tell the shepherds the Good News!



Surprise! All the inns are full in Bethlehem. There is no place to sleep.



Surprise! The shepherds see baby Jesus.



Present Treasure Hunt Clues

<p>CLUE 1</p> <p>The wise men followed this to find baby Jesus.</p>	<p>E</p>	<p>CLUE 5</p> <p>He wanted the wise men to tell him where they found Jesus.</p>	<p>M</p>
<p>CLUE 2</p> <p>Jesus' mother and father.</p>	<p>M</p>	<p>CLUE 6</p> <p>They came from the East to look for Jesus.</p>	<p>A</p>
<p>CLUE 3</p> <p>Told Mary that she would give birth to a special baby.</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>CLUE 7</p> <p>Jesus was born in this city.</p>	<p>U</p>
<p>CLUE 4</p> <p>Angels announced the good news to them.</p>	<p>E</p>	<p>CLUE 8</p> <p>The wise men brought these special gifts for the baby Jesus.</p>	<p>L</p>

Christmas Characters Clues

MARY

- Everyday person (applies to all characters)
- Sang a song of Happiness to God
- Engaged to Joseph
- Visited by an angel
- Gave birth to a son named Jesus
- Lived in Nazareth
- Elizabeth's cousin
- Traveled to Bethlehem with Joseph
- Couldn't find room in the inn (Joseph also)
- Blessed by God (applies to all characters)

JOSEPH

- Everyday person (applies to all characters)
- Carpenter
- Engaged to Mary
- Didn't believe Mary at first
- Took Mary to Bethlehem
- Couldn't find room in the inn (Mary also)
- Blessed by God (applies to all characters)

ELIZABETH

- Everyday person (applies to all characters)
- Mary's cousin
- Gave birth to a son named John
- Her baby wiggled inside her
- Blessed by God (applies to all characters)

SHEPHERDS

- Everyday person (applies to all characters)
- Worked with sheep
- Slept outside on Christmas night
- Ran to Bethlehem to meet Jesus
- Heard the angels sing
- Blessed by God (applies to all characters)

Christmas Pictionary Clues

Star	Mary	Joseph	Nazareth
Bethlehem	Baby Jesus	Sheep	Shepherd
Manger	Angel	Donkey	Stable
Wise men	Camel	Christmas tree	Present
Church	Candle	Toys	Stockings
Fireplace	Christmas lights	Christmas cookie	Innkeeper
Christmas ornament	Candy cane	Night	Hay